

New Fiction

Continued from Preceding Page.

a delicacy of treatment which might easily have been spoiled in a striving for the melodramatic.

There are some fifteen stories in the collection, few of which should prove dull to the most exacting reader. They achieve a technical mastery without striving for any of the effects which by their transparency so often mar the effectiveness of this form. If there is an occasional surprise ending, it certainly does not shock the reader's credulity. The book will please any one who is searching for diversion and is not averse to a slight strain of perfectly logical adventure.

THE MYSTERY OF THE HIDDEN ROOM.
By Marion Harvey. Edward J. Clode.

THE title of this suffices in itself as indication of a certain merit, for there is no better stage property for a mystery story than an old house with a secret chamber, whether it is to be peopled by ghosts or assorted villains. And this title is too modest for there are no less than three hidden chambers in the house of the story, which is picturesquely located at the upper end of New York (near Broadway and Dyckman street, to be exact) which is a truly romantic neighborhood. In fact, Riverside Drive has come to be as dangerous a spot in detective story fiction, as Chinatown. This story is also fitted out with a super-villain; a very bad egg, indeed. The introductory murder is nicely conducted. The undesirable husband of the leading lady is apparently found shot to death in his study, and the lady is caught with a pistol in her hand, by her lover. The problem is to prove that she didn't do it.

The suspense is excellently kept up. The right clue is honestly offered at the start, and the very experienced reader will guess correctly—in part—before he has gone far, but he will also meet a genuine surprise at the real climax in the unmasking of the villain. The necessary super-detective is a frank imitation of Sherlock Holmes, but is very well done. The only real fault to be found is that the author neglects to explain fully just what became of that stray hundred and fifty thousand dollars which turns up, here and there in cash. Probably the villain had it in his pants pocket when he passes out, but it is really too large a sum, even in these days, to be quite ignored. Otherwise, the pieces are all carefully picked up at the end. A good puzzler.

THE JUNGLE GIRL. By Gordon Casserly. Edward J. Clode.

THIS is the British equivalent for the standard American Wild West yarn. Beside the lady and the tiger on the jacket there are other wild ladies and animals which make the stage center a highly dangerous and busy place all the time. There is also a pleasant beast; the tame elephant, Badshah, who acts as nurse to two attractive babies. The others are not so agreeable: wild boars, wild elephants, tigers and a disturbing variety and abundance of snakes. It is aptly said that the "jungle is teeming with vivid threats." Special mention should be made of the lovely crocodile who almost gets the villainess; that is a movie stunt directed at the great heart of the "peepul," and it is a bull's-eye shot. Nor will the not too critical reader find much fault with the author's style. A certain arid, chopping statement of bare fact, the schematic presentation of human character in outline, is really all that is needed by this type of book. It begins with the popular and naughty triangle situation, but the hero is extricated from this with painstaking morality and readjusted to a more satisfactory geometric arrangement.

THE STONE IN THE PATH. By Maud H. Chapin. Duffield and Company.

THE glamorous setting of sixteenth century Florence makes a splendid background for this romantic tale of unhappy passion. It is built upon the not unfamiliar theme of the monk who succumbs to earthly love and is duly punished for it—Abelard and Heloise. The unfortunate young man is also a painter, and the girl is a daughter of a great Magnifico, Messer Corso. It works out to the inevitable tragic end, with some little mystic

relief as an epilogue. The theme is handled with delicacy, fineness of manner and no little power at the dramatic moments. If all the figures are a little conventional that is no doubt nearly inevitable in any such attempt to revive the period. The stern father is especially well done, though he is suspiciously modern in some of his mental attitudes. The best quality of the book is its warmth of coloring, its atmosphere, which is, perhaps, of the "Never never land" rather than actually of the Florence of that date, but is none the less delectable.

JOAN OF ARC OF THE NORTH WOODS.
By Holman Day. Harper & Bros.

IF one had never met this plot before the story might be hailed as a good thing, but it has been done so many times, in the same way, that it calls for something a good deal more than this specimen has to make it palatable. Boarding house hash; the meal that has been blessed too often. The old recipe of the rival lumber interests, the very wicked, bloated financier, the noble village hero, the disinherited heiress, running around after each other in the "North Woods"; the girl mildly disguised, the financier very crooked and the hero very noble. But Mr. Day does it very well—if it must be done once more. His style is pleasant and the machinery runs smoothly. There is plenty of action, which would film nicely, and each of the stock characters does just what is to be expected of him.

SOWING AND REAPING. By W. Burns McGregor. Peter G. Boyle.

THIS is an interesting curiosity; a prose descendant of Gifted Hopkins and the Sweet Singer of Michigan. Its plot is a fairly good melodramatic affair, of rivalry between two young men, ending in a shooting match in which nearly all hands go off, like a bunch of firecrackers. It is dated a few years after the civil war, in a border State. But the charm of it lies in its manner and its diction, which is that of "Sandford and Merton"; a singular revival of an obsolete dialect. For instance, at a moment of great dramatic stress when the woman has been rebuked for praying she replies to her irate husband: "Your rebuke is probably merited, and I feel myself unable to argue against your cynicism. However, I shall endeavor to bring up our boy to reverence," and so on through page after page of amazing orations.

TIMOTHY'S SECOND WIFE. By Isla May Mullins. Fleming H. Revell Company.

THIS is made up of a sentimental religiosity, spread out rather thinly but managed gracefully enough. It is the "romance of a Southern parsonage," according to its label, and has some mildly humorous and pathetic touches, all carefully presented in such a way as to offend nobody's scruples or feelings. The wife—number one—is greatly concerned with her husband's future welfare, as she expects to die, and she devotes much cogitation to thinking out what sort of woman his second wife ought to be. How she ultimately manages to meet the desired ideal may be left to the reader to find out, as it depends for what effect it has upon its surprise.

WHERE THE SUN SWINGS NORTH. By Barrett Willoughby. G. P. Putnam's Sons.

AS a story of strenuous Alaskan adventure this is much the usual thing; a good specimen, with plenty of excitement, fighting and heroism and villainy, among miners, prospectors, cannery trappers and traders. But it is an unusually vivid book in its descriptions, and has life in its feeling for the wild country which Mr. Willoughby tells us is his "own country." There is a sincerity and directness of impression in it that lift it out of the ruck. His villain is a very heavy article, but he makes you believe in him, and he does pretty well with the others, but the chief value lies in the ensemble, which effectively makes a picture.

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